

Laura V. Carroll. Have You Heard Any Rumors Lately? Depictions of Librarians in Video Games. A Master's Paper for the M.S. in L.S. degree. April 29, 2021. 81 pages. Advisor: Casey Rawson

This study is a content analysis of depictions of librarians in video games. Studies of media portrayals of librarians have historically focused on film and literature. Though they are largely absent from academic research on this topic, video games posit an opportunity to examine librarian stereotypes in an interactive environment. Previous literature on depictions of librarians in popular culture is reviewed, and pervasive stereotypes are identified. Then, a quantitative content analysis and thematic narrative analysis of librarian characters in 10 video games is described. Librarian characters were found to exhibit stereotypes shown in other media. Female librarians exhibited more gendered stereotypes, such as the Bun Lady and Sexy Librarian. Male librarians were more varied, with no single stereotype observed in more than one male character. In considering the role of librarians in video games, library stakeholders can assess stereotypes in the popular imagination and reflect upon the profession.

Headings:

Librarians in Literature

Audiovisual materials

Interactive multimedia

HAVE YOU HEARD ANY RUMORS LATELY? DEPICTIONS OF LIBRARIANS IN  
VIDEO GAMES

by  
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A Master's paper submitted to the faculty  
of the School of Information and Library Science  
of the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill  
in partial fulfillment of the requirements  
for the degree of Master of Science in  
Library Science.

Chapel Hill, North Carolina

April 29 2021

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## Acknowledgments

I would like to express my deepest appreciation for Dr. Casey Rawson, my advisor and instructor, whose support throughout the past two years has been invaluable. Casey, you have encouraged me throughout the paper writing process. I am grateful for your patience and quick response to my panicked emails. I never planned to complete my schooling during a global pandemic, but you helped me to make the best of it.

The completion of my thesis would not have been possible without the aid of Dr. Sandra Hughes Hassell. Your profound belief in my skills and abilities was instrumental throughout my time at SILS. Thank you for your continued support and assistance.

I am extremely grateful to Dr. Brian Sturm, who has gone above and beyond supporting SILS students during the pandemic.

I would also like to extend my thanks to my colleagues, specifically Jenna Wine, Mara Plantholt, Gavin Shelton, Meg Everist, and Katie Green. My dear friends, you have been an endless source of advice and companionship throughout this process. I wish all of you the absolute best.

My parents have been instrumental in my education. Mom and Dad, thank you for your continued support of my academic career. I promise to be much more prompt in returning your calls now that this paper is done!

Lastly, I would like to thank my fiancé, Steven, whose proposal overshadowed my own.

## Introduction

"Have you heard any rumors lately?"

- The Dragonborn, *Skyrim*

What does it mean to be an information professional in a world where reading from a book can destroy it and scrolls can transport the reader to another plane of existence? In the *Elder Scrolls V: Skyrim*, the player character can learn about the world through books, librarians, and priests. Yet, one of the most accessible reference services is the bartender, whom players can ask about rumors, work leads, and local culture. While bartenders in *Skyrim* may not be what first comes to mind when considering video game librarians, they represent a multitude of game characters that serve the player as information experts. In a medium where players' actions can result in victory or loss, information is wound tightly with video game play. Yet, the ludic librarian remains obscure from much of the game studies and information science literature.

Stereotypes about librarians exist throughout popular culture and influence public perceptions and use of knowledge institutions. Librarians have examined and challenged their depictions in popular media and have often found them wanting (Keer & Carlos, 2014). These stereotypes are pervasive—in my work as a librarian, I have been referred to as “Marian” and a “cat lady.” Male patrons have told me that “all librarians are a little kinky.” Sometimes, the weight of the cardigan is too heavy. Librarian stereotypes often devalue library work, presenting librarians as stern spinsters or closeted sexpots. Given

the potential impact of librarian stereotypes on patron interactions, professional status, and pay, librarians have expressed concern over how their presentation impacts public perception (Pagowsky & Rigby, 2014). Though a large body of scholarship has examined the librarian stereotype in popular media, research in the area of librarianship in videogames is underdeveloped.

This study addresses the video game librarian and responds to a gap in information science literature by examining information professionals in interactive media. I explore the representation of librarians in video games and assess the construction of librarianship through game design. In comparing video game librarians to depictions of librarians in popular culture, I consider aspects of mechanics and player interactions that differentiate ludic librarians from their non-interactive counterparts. Through this analysis, the video game librarian is more than just a rumor.



## Literature Review

The vision for this paper is to build upon the work of researchers in popular culture and media studies through exploring depictions of librarians and library work in interactive media.

This paper will use the definition of *stereotype* as crafted by Keer and Carlos (2014, p.64), “a cultural shortcut that conveys simplistic assumptions about librarians as a group or about individual librarians as a result of their profession.” I will also use the term *depictions* to describe the representation of librarians as a group or of individual librarians in media.

Systematic inequality is central to the discussion of stereotypes. In particular, gender, race, and sexuality have shaped notions of the library profession. As librarianship is a woman-dominated field, conceptualizations of womanhood and femininity influence the economic and professional status of library work. In their book, *The Librarian Stereotype: Deconstructing Perceptions and Presentations of Information Work*, editors Nicole Pagowsky and Miriam Rigby (2014) note that, “in the case of information work, we are dealing with asserting our value in a profession, which, on the face of it, is devalued due to stereotypes of subservience and caring” (p. 10). Stereotypes are woven deeply into the perceptions and practice of librarianship. Literature on librarians in popular media often presents stereotypes of librarians as separate from the work and practice of librarianship, as images crafted beyond library walls. This tendency to think

of the negative aspects of librarian stereotypes as existing separate from praxis prevents us from recognizing and dismantling the power structures inherent within librarianship. Rather:

We cannot separate our understanding of library stereotypes from the history of librarianship that influenced their development in the first place. Librarians are not explicitly responsible for the creation and perpetuation of negative stereotypes at their own expense, but neither are they fully removed from the cultural milieu that gave birth to those stereotypes. (Keer & Carlos, 2014, p. 63)

## The Librarian as a Stereotype

This section will include descriptions of common librarian stereotypes: The Bun Lady, the Policeman, the Sexy Librarian, the Superhero Librarian, The Inept Librarian, and the Tattooed Librarian. I will also discuss the racist, sexist, and heterosexist assumptions that underpin the nature of these stereotypes.

One of the more common stereotypes of librarians discussed in the literature is that of the Bun Lady or Old Maid. The Bun Lady is a stern, rule-following older woman, donned in comfortable shoes, old-fashioned clothes, and glasses. Her lips are curved into a permanent shush. The Bun Lady stereotype has been perpetuated throughout media, from the film *Star Wars: Attack of the Clones* to action figures (Duncan, 2004). Perhaps the Nancy Pearl action figure is one of the most prototypical examples — as players push the button on the doll's back, the figure raises her index finger to her lips and whispers “shhhh” (Duncan, 2004). Like all librarian stereotypes, the Bun Lady does not exist in isolation of librarians' praxis. Radford (1998) connects the image of the Bun Lady to fear and power. He writes, “such images serve to reinforce, in their very triviality and harmlessness, a particular network of power relations that connect the librarian, the user,

and the text” (p. 618). The stereotype of the shushing librarian creates tension between librarian and library user, one in which order supersedes user needs. Radford links this tension to positivist models of library practice in which information flows in a single direction — from a more informed person to a less informed person. Drawing on Foucault’s concept of “La Bibliotheque Fantastique,” Radford argues for a re-conceptualization of the librarian as a guide rather than a “librarian-god” (p. 632).

The Policeman takes Radford’s (1998) idea of the “librarian-god” to the extreme through an obsession with rules, discipline, and punishment. Seale (2008) describes the Policeman as “the possession of authority and/or knowledge and the ability to act on it.” In the library, this sort of authority can come in the form of library fines, strict adherence to policy, or even verbal humiliation of patrons. The Policeman stereotype is present in the YouTube video *Thug Librarian Prank!!* (Gurley, 2016), in which Ernie, a pretend librarian, asks a patron if they have their library card. When the patron replies “no,” Ernie tells the patron to “get the f\*\*k out of my library.”

Another common stereotype is the Sexy Librarian, who, in counter to the Bun Lady, does not button her cardigan all the way up. She is young and beautiful. An example of the Sexy Librarian is Miss Dalton from the *Saturday Night Live* skit, “The Librarian” (Michaels, 2016). In the skit, a group of male patrons comment on Miss Dalton’s hotness, which leads to her asking, “well... what are you going to do about it?” As Miss Dalton begins to take off her glasses and let down her hair, the skit attempts to subvert the stereotype as she loses chunks of her hair, eats a banana peel, and commits

“straight up murder.” The skit ends with her flashing the group of male patrons as their heads explode.

Both the Bun Lady and the Sexy Librarian stereotype reveal assumptions about gender and femininity beyond library work. Are women library workers stern, unattractive gatekeepers of knowledge or pieces of decoration meant for bending over carts? These sexist stereotypes have consequences for women in the field. In her article, “Reflections on Gender Oppression and Libraries,” Sarah Lawton (2018) links these stereotypes to discomfort with female authority. She notes that “these broad societal views reinforce and perpetuate the institutional and structural inequities that result in lower wages, longer hours, and dysfunctional gender dynamics in the workplace” (p. 19). These stereotypes further marginalize people of color, queer, and disabled people. The Bun Lady and the Sexy Librarian are almost always depicted as white, heterosexual, and able-bodied.

In contrast to the Bun Lady, the Superhero Librarian dons a cape and is vigilant in espousing the virtues of intellectual freedom and information access. Archie McPhee, the creators of the original Nancy Pearl action figure, re-released the figure in superhero form (*The history of the librarian action figure and Nancy Pearl*, n.d.). This time, Pearl has traded her cardigan for a red cape with matching red glasses. Unlike the Bun Lady and the Sexy Librarian, the Superhero Librarian can be male. One notable example is Rupert Giles from the television show *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*. Giles is handsome and heroic, “engaging in the traditionally un-librarian position of helping to slay vampires and other evils” (Dickinson, 2002, p. 107). While Superhero Librarians may appear to be

a more positive stereotype than the Bun Lady, this stereotype impacts perceptions of library work. Viewing librarians as heroes or martyrs can serve as justification for lower pay and devaluation of the profession – with such a noble calling, librarians should be willing to work for little or no pay.

The Superhero Librarian is not the only stereotype associated with male librarians. Stereotypes of male librarians have shifted throughout the history of the profession. Dickinson argues that the feminization of librarianship and the association of the field with “women’s work” gave rise to the depiction of male librarians as effeminate (2002, p. 105). In Early America, male librarians were the stereotype and were often seen as grim bibliophiles (Dickinson, 2008, p. 98). The stereotype of the Inept Librarian reflects this Early American stereotype through his “failure in both the social and working worlds” (Seale, 2008). Like the Bun Lady, the Inept Librarian is reserved and bookish, but is less subject to a specific appearance or sexual presentation.

A newer stereotype is that of the Tattooed Librarian. While this stereotype has not been well-described in the literature, it has been mentioned as an alternative to the Bun Lady in numerous works (Bartlett, 2014; Dodds, 2009; Korodaj, 2011). The Tattooed Librarian is hip and alternative. They may wear cardigans and glasses, but they bought them at a trendy thrift store or a vintage clothing website. One notable aspect of this stereotype is that it has been curated and promoted by librarians. The Tattooed Librarian has been showcased on librarians’ blogs, such as The Annoyed Librarian or The Illustrated Librarian as a sort of “anti-stereotype” (Dodds, 2009). Yet, in comparison to stereotypes such as the Bun Lady and the Sexy Librarian, the Tattooed librarian

stereotype exclusively describes the librarian's appearance and says little about behavior or demeanor. Is the Tattooed Librarian more welcoming than the Bun Lady or as patron-focused as the Superhero Librarian? Without answering these questions, the Tattooed Librarian does little to alter the public's perception of librarianship.

Despite the alternative stereotypes of the Tattooed Librarian and the Superhero Librarian, traditional librarian stereotypes remain prevalent throughout popular media. Through means of systematic literature review, Vassilakaki and Moniarou-Papaconstantinou (2014) found that stereotypes of librarians have not changed considerably over time. However, the impact of such stereotypes on perceptions of librarians is unclear. A 2018 study by Borchard et al. found "no discernible impact of the common pop culture portrayal of librarians on students' images of librarians" (p. 49).

Stereotypes are not the only means of assessing portrayals of librarians. In contrast to the large body of literature that assesses patterns in librarians' depictions as stereotypes, Michelle Baxter (2014) examines these patterns through archetypes. Her research introduces five librarian archetypes: The Woman, The Farce, The Hero, The Guardian, and The Monster. While several sub-archetypes in these categories closely resemble recurring traits found in stereotypes of librarians (the Frumpy Shusher and the Closet Sexpot are much akin to the Bun Lady and the Sexy Librarian), many are unique. For example, the Perfectly Prim and Proper sub-archetype of The Woman shares behavioral traits of rule-following with the Bun Lady but is not unattractive or sexless (pp. 6-7). Baxter encourages examination of librarian characters beyond their stereotypical aspects stating that:

By concentrating on the negative stereotype aspect of the characters, librarians miss the opportunity to see the character within the context of the story itself. By looking at the story's context, librarians can see these characters as readers see them: as archetypes who are integral to each story they inhabit. (p. 43)

While stereotype is a helpful shortcut for understanding assumptions about librarians, it is limited in its ability to examine particular nuances of librarian characters.

Another means of examining depictions of librarians is personality type. In her comparison of the personalities of filmic librarians to the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator (MBTI) instrument, Threatt (2005) found that librarians displayed Introverted/Sensing/Thinking/Judging (ISTJ) characteristics. Scherdin and Beaubien (1995) found that the ISTJ type was also prevalent in library professionals. While Scherdin and Beaubien read the ISTJ type as positive, Threatt found that the type was depicted negatively in films, "what is evident and a common thread interspersed throughout these films is that the librarian provides unacceptable or inadequate reference assistance" (p. 7). Through assessing personality type, Threatt and Scherdin and Beaubien expand conceptions of librarianship beyond appearance and behavior.

## Librarians in Popular Culture

Media depictions of librarians have been studied extensively; however, research on the prevalence of negative librarian stereotypes in various media has led to inconsistent results. Robinson (2006) did not find clichés in a majority of Australian print media reporting. In contrast, Peresie and Alexander (2005) found an overall negative portrayal of librarians in young adult literature. Stereotypes of librarians appear to be pervasive in film. Aldred et al. (2008) conducted a content analysis of nineteen films to

explore how archivists are portrayed physically and behaviorally. Their analysis indicated that filmic archivists followed accepted stereotypes. Multiple librarian stereotypes in film are explored in *The Hollywood Librarian: A Look at Librarians Through Film* (Seidl, 2007). The dress and behavior of librarian characters shown in *The Hollywood Librarian* reflect negative librarian stereotypes such as the Bun Lady, the Policeman, and the Inept Librarian.

Other researchers have noted that portrayals of librarians in cinema are more nuanced than their stereotype. In her 2010 doctoral dissertation on role function of librarians in narrative realist horror films, Graham did not identify a singular stereotype. Rather, she argues that “the sign of librarian proved to be robust, elastic, purposeful, memorable, and truly multi-faceted, representing many distinctive types and personalities” (p. 133). Shaffer and Casey’s 2013 analysis of librarians in cinema indicated a similar nuance. In analyzing librarians and librarian roles in films from the United States, Europe, and Asia, Shaffer and Casey found that the stereotyping of librarians was frequent but not necessarily bad. Still, some authors have considered a lack of a clear image or stereotype to be harmful, such as in Oliver and Daniel (2015). In their research on portrayals of archivists in film, Oliver and Daniel assert that the lack of a clear image of filmic archivists “may stem from a lack of understanding of the archives profession by both the general public and the film industry” (p. 63).

Given the prevalence of librarian characters in cinema, researchers have drawn comparisons between filmic librarians and real librarians. Comparisons between Hollywood librarians and real librarians are found in Schmidt (2005) and Jaćimović and



Petrović (2014). Another such comparison occurs in a segment from the film *The Hollywood Librarian: A Look at Librarians Through Film* (Seidl, 2007), which contrasts footage from a real-life baby storytime with clips of filmic librarians shushing patrons. The silenced youth patrons in these films clash with the smiling, singing children in real librarians' practice. The filmmakers note, "being a librarian, according to the movies, is usually anything but a wonderful life" (0:10:08).

This conflict between librarians' and the public's perceptions of librarianship is found in literature about portrayals of librarians on YouTube. Attebury (2010) found differences in YouTube videos created by librarians and videos created by non-librarians; librarians were likely to portray themselves as heroes, whereas non-librarians were more likely to portray negative stereotypes or parody. Similarly, Poulin (2008) found that portrayals of librarians on YouTube were almost exclusively negative. As a platform for user-generated content, YouTube differs from other media in its interactivity. Librarians and non-librarians can engage with one another through content creation, comments, and messages. Further examination of viewer/creator interaction via YouTube could provide insight into means of challenging or responding to librarian stereotypes.

## Librarians in Video Games

Assessing depictions of librarians in video games becomes intensely valuable as public librarians seek to incorporate video games into programs and collections. Yet, the majority of research related to depictions of librarians in popular media has been limited to non-interactive forms of media, such as film and literature. The discussion of librarians in video games is more robust outside of academic journals.

One notable exception is a Swedish thesis by Richard Holmström (2019), which examines libraries and librarians in video games. Holmström found that male librarian stereotypes were more varied than female librarian stereotypes, which often reflected images such as the Bun Lady and the Sexy Librarian.

In a post on the MMU library blog, Neil Marshall (2019) examines how librarians appear in a variety of video games. Some of the librarians were stereotypical Policemen, such as the Phatt Island Librarian in *Monkey Island Two*. However, other librarians represented a less commonly examined type, one described in Baxter (2014) as The Monster. These characters had supernatural powers and threatened player characters. For example, Marshall describes the librarians of *Dragon Age: Inquisition*, who have transformed into demons over millennia and “now hunt anyone who dares walk the halls of the shattered library.” Another game, *Fallout 4*, takes place in an apocalyptic wasteland. While the game does not contain a librarian character, their pre-apocalypse presence is felt throughout the world in the form of book return reward machines. Players can return books to the modules in exchange for “fun items” like grenades (Marshall, 2019). According to Marshall, games like *Fallout 4* demonstrate “how changes in the world of libraries, such as the commercialisation of public libraries, may affect us.” Marshall also noted that some games offered a more realistic or positive view of librarianship, such as the happy library in *Cities: Skylines*.

Though Marshall surveys a small portion of librarian characters in video games, his findings suggest that video games may present librarianship differently than in other media. For example, discussions on commercialism and class were largely absent from

literature on librarians in pop culture. Also, as in Graham (2010), the librarian characters exhibited more nuance from the standard stereotypes such as the Bun Lady or the Policeman.

Another discussion of librarians and video games can be found on the Tumblr blog Libraries in Video Games (n.d.). The blog, which was active from May 2014 until April 2018, compiles images and descriptions of video game libraries. With a focus on library spaces rather than librarians, the blog examines how features such as architecture, furniture, layout, and symbols communicate information about libraries. In one post, restricted areas and the “librarian as gatekeeper” are examined through the game *Heroes Tactics* (Libraries in Video Games, 2017). The author writes, “although the role of modern libraries is to provide access to timely and accurate information, the library as a restricted area -therefore, the librarian as a gatekeeper- remains a stereotype in popular culture.” As with previous literature that compares depictions of librarians in popular media with real librarians, Libraries in Video Games finds substantial differences in depictions and reality.

## Content Analysis in Video Games

As an interactive medium, video games pose several challenges to researchers conducting content and narrative analysis. With non-interactive media, such as film or literature, the text is consistent regardless of the researcher’s engagement. This is not to say that the researcher and text exist independently from the society and experiences in which they inhabit or that researchers are unable to converse with the text. bell hooks

writes about how Black women spectators can challenge or disrupt cinema through the oppositional gaze:

Looking at films with an oppositional gaze, black women were able to critically assess the cinema's construction of white womanhood as an object of phallogentric gaze and choose not to identify with either the victim or the perpetrator. Black female spectators, who refused to identify with white womanhood, who would not take on the phallogentric gaze of desire and possession, created a critical space where the binary opposition Mulvey posits of 'woman as image, man as bearer of the look' was continually deconstructed." (2003, p. 99)

When examining interactive media content, the researcher can engage with the text as a participant. In video games, the act of play introduces variance. Games vary with each play session and each player (Schmierbach, 2009, p. 150). Video game players engage in different play styles and differ in their motivations for play. Yee (2006) introduced an empirical model of player motivations in video games that identifies three overarching components: achievement, social, and immersion. A player motivated by achievement, for example, may seek out opportunities to maximize their performance or compete with other players. As a result of differing motivations, "the same video game may have very different meanings or consequences for different players" (Yee, 2006, p. 774). Still, players must function within the mechanical constraints of the game (unless they modify the game software); their choices are not unlimited. The video game librarian is a result of both player and developer construction – a result of player choice and action, but also of the specific confines of game design.

## Research Questions

The purpose of this study is to examine the ways librarians are depicted in video games. This paper addresses the following research questions:

1. How are librarians depicted in video games?
2. How do depictions of librarians in video games compare to depictions of librarians in non-interactive popular media?
3. Are there differences in representations of librarians in video games based on gender?

In this study, *librarian* is defined as “an individual employed within a library or archive who provides access to information, or an individual with the title of ‘librarian’ or ‘archivist’ who provides access to information.” A monster employed to guard a library would not be considered a librarian, but a circulation clerk would.

## Methodology

This study used content analysis to examine depictions of librarians in video games. The analysis includes a quantitative content analysis of the visual and demographic characteristics of librarian characters. Thematic narrative analysis was used to describe librarians' narrative roles and to assess gender differences in depictions. This section begins with an exploration of my positionality in relation to gaming and librarianship. Next, I describe the sampling method and population. Lastly, I detail the data collection and analysis aspects of this study.

### Positionality / Researcher Role

As a library worker and library school student, I may hold different beliefs about librarians and view librarian characters differently than other players. I also have extensive prior experience in playing video games and used my own gaming consoles to conduct this study. As mentioned in the literature review, video game players have differing motivations to play video games, which influence their approach to gameplay (Yee, 2006). I typically play games for immersion and am particularly motivated by lore and role-playing.

### Sample

As a list of all video games featuring librarians as characters does not exist, I developed a sampling frame using Wikipedia's "List of Best-Selling Video Game

Franchises” (2020). First, I went through the list of games and searched each game’s wiki on Fandom.com for “librarian,” “library,” and “archivist,” so that I could identify which games had a librarian character who was prominent enough to feature on the game’s wiki. While it is possible that some games may have a librarian character not included or described on the wiki, I felt that this method would help me to identify well-known librarian characters in popular franchises. I then used purposive sampling to identify a sample of video games that met the following criteria for inclusion:

1. Games must feature a character who is a librarian. This means that the character must work in a library or archive and provide access to information or have the title of “librarian” or “archivist” and provide access to information.
2. The character must be visually depicted in the game. Games with text or audio-only depictions of librarians are not included.
3. The player must be able to interact with the librarian in some way, including through play or dialog.
4. If a franchise features more than one game with a librarian character, I selected the most recently released game.

Further, I restricted the sample to games available for iOS, Xbox One, PlayStation 4, Nintendo Switch, or PlayStation 3. These are the gaming consoles I had access to prior to the start of the study, and I limited myself to these consoles as a cost-saving measure. After evaluating each game against these criteria, I ended up with a sample of 10 games.

Though my sample was limited to best-selling video game franchises, this method allowed me to select among popular, current video games. In this way, the sample is representative of depictions of librarian video game characters in popular culture. This sample is likely not reflective of all depictions of librarians in video games, especially those featured in video games from independent game studios. Purposive sampling within the sampling frame was also appropriate given the limited time to conduct this research. The COVID-19 pandemic resulted in a shortened Fall 2020 semester and an uncertain Spring semester at my institution. Random sampling of video games is possible, especially if a researcher restricts the population to a specific content rating or release year (Schmierbach, 2009). However, I was limited to games that I could acquire quickly and affordably during a pandemic. When possible, I used library copies of video games and game rental services to further reduce costs.

Deciding upon units of analysis presents a particular challenge in video game content analysis, as content of games can vary by level, play mode, or player (Schmierbach, 2009). My analysis included each interaction the player can have with the librarian character, including multi-player segments when applicable. Additionally, as many games have hundreds of hours of content and online games could be played indefinitely, I limited content analysis to a maximum of 10 hours of gameplay.

## Data Collection Methods

I began data collection by starting a playthrough of each game. I used user-created game walkthroughs to identify sequences of the game that included the librarian



characters. Though data collection focused on the librarian character, I made sure to note overarching themes and content of each game.

As I played through the games, I noted the physical characteristics of librarian characters, character traits, and aspects of game mechanics. I recorded my observations using a coding worksheet while playing each game. See Appendix A for the coding worksheet. As I limited units of analysis to 10 hours of play, I viewed fan-created video walkthroughs to supplement for games that had scenes with the librarian character that required more than 10 hours of play. These games included *Halo 4*, *Assassin's Creed Syndicate*, *Harry Potter: Hogwarts Mystery*, and *Final Fantasy VIII Remastered*. I continued to record observations on the coding sheet while viewing these walkthroughs.

As mentioned in the literature review, one challenge of video game analysis is that game narrative varies by player choice. As the sole player in this study, my observations are biased by my player motivations and prior gaming experience. Rather than viewing each playthrough as an objective engagement with the text, I drew from my own experiences to inform my choices. For games in which I could create a player character, such as *The Elder Scrolls V: Skyrim – Special Edition* and *Harry Potter: Hogwarts Mystery*, I named the character after myself and made choices based on how I would typically respond in a game. Future researchers of librarian video game characters may want to consider using multiple players for each game to represent a wider range of player experiences.

## Coding Method

Using previous literature on video game content analysis and librarian stereotypes, I encoded the following variables for each librarian character.

### *Demographic Characteristics*

Demographic characteristics of species, race/ethnicity, gender, age, job, and sexual orientation were recorded for each character. Some of these characteristics were not explicitly stated within the game. In these cases, I examined stereotyped signifiers of demographic characteristics to assess a character's identity. For example, one character was a mushroom person. While mushrooms are not explicitly male or female, the game designers gave this character female gender signifiers such as long pink pigtails and a feminine name ending, "-ette." If a character's demographic characteristics were ambiguous, they were recorded as "unknown." Lastly, some characters were non-human, such as aliens or orcs, and did not have any discernable features associated with certain demographic characteristics, such as race or gender. If a character's demographic characteristics were ambiguous because they were non-human, they were recorded as "non-human."

### *Principality*

I coded a character's importance to the game's story using a method similar to Fares (2014). Characters were divided into three categories:

- *Primary*: a main character, typically controlled by the player.
- *Secondary*: a character who speaks and interacts with main characters as a part of the game's storyline.

- *Tertiary*: a background character. The player may interact with this character but may not necessarily engage with the character throughout the course of the game.

### *Stereotypes*

Based on librarian stereotypes identified in previous literature, I assessed each character's adherence to the following stereotypes:

- *The Bun Lady*: the librarian is a stern older woman who dresses unfashionably, wears glasses, or styles her hair in a bun. She may also shush other characters.
- *The Policeman*: the librarian speaks about library rules or reprimands characters for their use of the library. This behavior presents a barrier to the character's full access of the library.
- *The Superhero*: the librarian exhibits prosocial behaviors that improve the community. The librarian is associated with values in the American Library Association's *Library Bill of Rights* (2019), such as free access and intellectual freedom.
- *The Inept Librarian*: the librarian is socially inept, withdrawn, and bookish. The character may perform poorly at the customer service or technical aspects of library work.
- *The Tattooed Librarian*: the librarian is signified as cool or edgy in some way. The character may have tattoos, have hair dyed a non-natural color, or dress in an alternative style.

- *The Sexy Librarian*: the librarian is signified as sexy in some way, such as through revealing clothing or flirting behavior. The character can also be signified as sexy through cinematic aspects of the game; for example, a player may be able to use the camera to look up a character's skirt.
- *The Monster*: The character is an antagonist and is associated with violence or supernatural powers.

### *Mechanics*

Based on my previous experience as a gamer, I selected aspects of game mechanics for evaluation. Characters were first evaluated based on whether a player could play as the character (playability). Then, characters were assessed as to whether they could be injured or killed by the player. I noted if the character used a weapon and, if so, recorded the type. Characters were also assessed based on their ability to assign quests to the main character. Lastly, I recorded whether librarian characters sold items to the player.

### Data Analysis Methods

Once data was collected, I calculated descriptive statistics related to characters' demographic characteristics using the coding worksheet. I also performed a quantitative content analysis. Next, I analyzed aspects of game mechanics and narrative to identify themes within the data. I assessed the appearance, personality, narrative role, and character-related mechanics for each librarian character.

## Research Quality and Ethical Considerations

I have used the following methods to improve the trustworthiness of this study.

First, to ensure credibility, I have invested considerable time with each video game (approximately 10 hours of play each) to form a comprehensive view of each librarian character. Additionally, this work is grounded in existing theory – both in the fields of game studies and in library science. As I crafted the data collection instrument, I compared my measures to existing instruments. I used the stereotypes and archetypes of librarianship described in the literature review to inform the creation of the coding sheet.

In selecting a sample size for this research, I was limited by time, cost, and lack of an existing sampling frame. As such, I limited my sample to 10 video games. However, this sampling method precludes the calculation of margins of error and confidence intervals. Though the quantitative results of this research may not be generalizable, I have used thick description to aid in transferability of qualitative results.

Though I will not be able to conduct statistical reliability testing, I have improved the dependability of my study through including examples from raw data alongside conclusions and interpretations. For example, I have included quotes from characters and images of characters' visual depictions, where appropriate. I have also detailed any changes in the research design from the proposal stage. Lastly, I had another researcher analyze a small portion of my data and discuss themes with me.

One ethical consideration is my identification as a gamer and as a librarian. I view both fields positively, and my biases may lead me to view certain depictions as positive. I have addressed these biases through my statement on positionality. Additionally, I managed these concerns through the use of coding sheets, which ensure that my data collection is consistent between each game.

## Findings

### Statistical Overview

A total of 10 games from the Wikipedia “List of Best-Selling Video Game Franchises” (2020) were identified as meeting the criteria for inclusion in the study. Of the 10 games, six were played on XBOX One, one was played on a Windows PC, one was played on PlayStation 4, and one was played on iOS. The 10 games were released between 2011 and 2020. Two of the games, *Final Fantasy VIII Remastered* (Dotemu et al., 2019) and *The Elder Scrolls V: Skyrim – Special Edition* (Bethesda Game Studios, 2016), were remastered versions of video games previously released on older consoles. Additionally, three librarian characters were only featured in downloadable content packages (DLC) available for purchase in addition to the main game. Six games were developed in North America, two were developed in Europe, one was developed in Asia, and one was developed in Europe and Asia. See Table 1 for an overview of each librarian character by video game.

**Table 1***Librarian Characters by Video Game Appearance*

Character	Video Game	Developer (Location)	Release
Isabelle Ardant	<i>Assassin's Creed Syndicate</i>	Ubisoft Quebec (Canada)	2015
Harriet	<i>Borderlands 3 - Guns, Love and Tentacles: The Marriage of Wainwright &amp; Hammerlock</i>	Gearbox Software (United States)	2020
Urag gro-Shub	<i>The Elder Scrolls V: Skyrim – Special Edition</i>	Bethesda Game Studios (United States)	2016
Library Girl with a Pigtail	<i>Final Fantasy VIII Remastered</i>	Dotemu, Access Games, & Square Enix (France and Japan)	2019
The Librarian	<i>Halo 4</i>	343 Industries (United States)	2012
Madam Irma Pince	<i>Harry Potter: Hogwarts Mystery</i>	Jam City (United States)	2018
Librarian	<i>Minecraft</i>	Mojang (Sweden)	2011
Pingala the Educator	<i>Sid Meier's Civilization VI: Rise and Fall</i>	Firaxis Games (United States)	2018
Archivist Toadette	<i>Super Mario Odyssey</i>	Nintendo EPD (Japan)	2017
Tuur	<i>The Witcher 3: Wild Hunt – Hearts of Stone</i>	CD Projekt Red (Poland)	2015

Note. n=10.

Demographic information was collected. The ratio of male to female librarian characters was 1:2, which is higher than in real life. In 2017, 83.5% of librarians in the United States were female (Data USA, 2017a.) Within the sample of video games in the current study, 30% (n=3) of characters were male, and 60% (n=6) of characters were



female. One librarian character was non-human and came from a culture without a concept of gender. Compared to demographics of librarians in real life, male librarian characters were more common in the sampled games.

Forty percent (n=4) of librarian characters were non-human. Of the human characters, half (n=3) were white, and half (n=3) were Asian. Two of the games with Asian librarians were developed in North America, and one was developed in Asia (this game was also the only game in the sample in which the majority of human characters were Asian). The racial demographics of the sampled librarian characters are not consistent with the real-life demographics of librarians and reflect more diversity than exists within the field. American librarianship is predominantly white, especially in comparison to the general public. In 2017, 81.3% of U.S. librarians were white and non-Hispanic compared to 62.5% of the general United States population (Data USA, 2017b). The second most common race or ethnicity of librarians is Black; Black librarians comprised 6.38% of U.S. librarians in 2017 (Data USA, 2017b). There were no Black librarians in the sample. Of the non-human librarians, half (n=2) had light skin, and half (n=2) had grey skin.

All 10 characters appeared to be adults. Three characters (30%) appeared to be over the age of 65, and two characters (20%) appeared to be under 30 years old. The remaining five characters (50%) appeared to be between the ages of 30-65.

Sexual orientation was not explicitly stated for any character. Half of all characters (n=5) did not have a discernable sexual orientation. These characters did not have any romantic or sexual relationships depicted in the game. Forty percent (n=4) of

characters were in a heterosexual relationship or had a romantic interest in a character of another gender during the game. All four characters depicted as heterosexual were female. The non-human character from a species without a concept of gender was able to reproduce with adult members of their species; however, sexual orientation labels do not apply to this character.

While the most common job title of librarian characters was “Librarian” (n=6), titles and job roles varied. Two characters had paraprofessional library roles as a “Library Assistant” and a “Library Committee Member.” One character held the title of “Archivist.” Lastly, one character was in upper management of their institution as an “Operations Executive.”

In terms of principality, no librarian character was a primary character in their narrative. Half of librarian characters (n=5) were secondary characters, meaning that the player had to interact with them through the course of the game’s main narrative. The remaining half of the librarian characters (n=5) were tertiary characters, meaning that the player did not have to interact with them as a part of the game’s main narrative.

## Librarian Stereotypes

Most librarian characters (n=7, 70%) exhibited at least one of the seven stereotypes examined in this study. The most common stereotype was the Policeman, which was observed in 40% (n=4) of characters, and the second most common was the Monster, which was observed in 30% (n=3) of characters. The Bun Lady and the Sexy Librarian were both exhibited in two characters, or 20% of the population. For female characters, the most common stereotype was the Policeman (n=3, 30%). Additionally, the

Bun Lady was only observed in white female librarians, and the Sexy Librarian was only observed in the two Asian female librarians. Stereotypes of male characters were more varied, and no single stereotype was observed in more than one male character. The Tattooed Librarian and the Superhero were each observed in one character, both of whom were male. The Inept Librarian was not observed in the sample. See Table 2 for the frequency of each stereotype by gender.

**Table 2**

*Frequency of Librarian Stereotypes Observed by Gender*

Stereotype	Frequency	
	Males	Females
The Bun Lady	0	2
The Policeman	1	3
The Superhero	1	0
The Inept Librarian	0	0
The Tattooed Librarian	1	0
The Sexy Librarian	0	2
The Monster	1	2

*Note.* n=10. No stereotypes were observed in the character who was not male or female.

In terms of appearance, librarians had many commonalities. Most characters were designed with visual signifiers of library or intellectual work, such as lab coats, academic regalia, ID badges, or pocket protectors (n=8). Forty percent of all characters wore glasses (n=4).

Violence was a common mechanic that players could use to interact with librarians. Eight of the 10 librarian characters were able to be injured or killed by the player. However, only four of the librarian characters were observed using a weapon. Other mechanics observed include quest-giving, seen in half of librarians (n=5), and selling items, seen in 20% of librarians (n=2). None of the librarian characters were playable.

## Character Descriptions and Traits

This section will include findings from the thematic narrative analysis and ludological analysis of each game. I will include a brief overview of each game and librarian character and provide a visual description of the character. I will also discuss aspects of the narrative and mechanics that inform the librarian's role within the game.

### Archivist Toadette – *Super Mario Odyssey*

*Super Mario Odyssey* is a platform game released by Nintendo EPD in 2017. After completing the main storyline of the game, players can meet Archivist Toadette in the Mushroom Kingdom. She gives the player 61 extra challenges to complete and rewards the player with Power Moons – collectible items which are used to unlock portions of the game.

Archivist Toadette greets the player with a smile on her face and jumps for joy throughout their interactions. Most of her sentences end in exclamation points. With bright pink pigtails patterned like a mushroom, a backpack, and hat, Archivist Toadette's appearance differs from librarian stereotypes such as the Bun Lady, the Sexy Librarian,

or the Tattooed Librarian. See Figure 1 for an image of Archivist Toadette.

Helpful and cheerful, her personality also differs from many depictions of librarians in popular media.

### Figure 1

*Screenshot of Mario interacting with Archivist Toadette*



*Note.* Archivist Toadette speaks to Mario beside Princess Peach’s throne and says, “Congratulations, Mario! You’ve achieved something new!” Taken by Laura Carroll. From Nintendo EPD. (2017). *Super Mario Odyssey* [Video game]. Kyoto: Nintendo.

Instead, Archivist Toadette more closely reflects tropes about female video game characters than stereotypes of librarians. In particular, Archivist Toadette falls into the Ms. Male Character trope initially described by Anita Sarkeesian in her *Tropes vs. Women in Video Games* YouTube series (2013). Sarkeesian describes the Ms. Male Character trope as “a female version of an already established or default male character. Ms. Male Characters are defined primarily by their relationship to their male counterparts

via their visual properties, their narrative connection, or occasionally through promotional materials” (3:23). Archivist Toadette’s long pink hair and “-ette” name ending feminize her and distinguish her from the default male character, Toad.

Still, Archivist Toadette’s appearance is not completely dependent on gender signifiers. The “Archivist” portion of her outfit consists of a tan explorer’s hat, cargo pants and shirt, red bandana, belt, and backpack. These aspects of her appearance imply exploration and fieldwork. While Archivist Toadette assigns Mario quests, she is dressed to embark on her own adventures. Through her appearance, personality, and in-game role, Archivist Toadette presents archival work as active, playful, and rewarding.

### Harriet – *Borderlands 3*

#### *Guns, Love, and Tentacles: The Marriage of Wainwright and Hammerlock*

(Gearbox Software, 2020) is a downloadable content pack (DLC) for the game *Borderlands 3*. The content pack can be purchased as an add-on to the main *Borderlands 3* game. The DLC takes place on the planet of Xylourgos, home to a Lovecraftian-inspired cult that worships a dead tentacle monster. When the player attends a wedding on the planet, it soon becomes evident that many citizens of the planet have been cursed by members of the cult. One such resident is Harriet, a librarian of the Dustbound Archives.

Harriet is an older white woman whose appearance and personality fit the classic Bun Lady stereotype. With plain brown clothing, glasses, a shawl, and a tight grey bun, she appears old-fashioned and stern. In the player’s first interaction with Harriet, the librarian does not make eye contact. When the player travels to the library in search of a

cookbook, Harriet will not assist the player unless they silence a noisy book club by killing its members. If the player chooses not to kill the members of the book club, the members ultimately kill one another following an argument on whether audiobooks count as reading.

Violence and surveillance are present throughout the Dustbound Archives. “Quiet Please” signs adorn the walls (see Figure 2), and the player is warned of the “terrible fate” of late fees (Gearbox Software, 2020). The player needs a library card to use the library, and certain books are located in the “Forbidden Stacks.” The library is full of cult members who attack the player on sight, making visits to the library dangerous.

**Figure 2**

*Screenshot of library signage*



*Note.* The player points a gun at a “quiet please” sign, which features an image of a mouth with a finger in the shushing position and the prohibition sign of a circle with a backlash. Taken by Laura Carroll. From Gearbox Software. (2020). *Borderlands 3 - Guns, Love and Tentacles: The Marriage of Wainwright & Hammerlock* [Video game]. Novato: 2K Games.

With a supernatural tentacle monster affecting the residents of Xylourgos, many of the residents are monstrous and Harriet is no exception. When touching a sentient book, Harriet transforms into a horror, now referred to as “What Once Was Harriet.” Harriet attacks the player, who must then kill Harriet to complete their mission.

While Harriet’s character has aspects of the Bun Lady and the Policeman, her character is more nuanced than these stereotypes alone. While exploring the library, I noticed photographs on some of the walls which featured a woman who looks similar to Harriet. In these photos, her hair is down, her clothes are form-fitting activewear, and she



is shown exploring the terrain of Xylourgos. Perhaps Harriet was not always the stern, hostile librarian that she presents as when the player first encounters her. Like most residents of Xylourgos, she has been affected by the monstrosity of the planet itself, transforming her into the darkest aspects of librarian stereotypes.

#### Isabelle Ardant – *Assassin's Creed Syndicate*

Unlike Harriet, who becomes a monster through circumstance, Isabelle Ardant of Ubisoft Quebec's 2015 video game, *Assassin's Creed Syndicate*, willingly uses her archival skills to control and manipulate. Ardant is a powerful member of the Templar Order – a shadow government that seeks to control humans in order to create a perfect society. She is one of the primary antagonists in the game.

Born in Hong Kong, Ardant was the “first woman to be recruited into Abstergo Industries by its ‘Young Innovators’ program” (Ubisoft Quebec, 2015). When she began work at Abstergo Industries, a front for the Templar Order, Ardant held the title of Digital Archivist. When the player meets Ardant, however, she works as the Operations Executive for Abstergo's Historical Research division. Her primary role as an archivist involves organizing and archiving genetic memories so that Abstergo can learn about human history and use this information to further the Templar Order's goals.

Ardant's appearance signifies villainy and sexuality (see Figure 3). She wears a black suit jacket with a deep V-neck and a ruff in place of lapels. At her neck is a thin black choker, and her makeup includes dark lipstick and eyeshadow. While her hair is in a bun, she has angled bangs that appear more modern than the traditional Bun Lady.

Rather, with form-fitting black clothes and high heels, her appearance resembles that of the Sexy Librarian.

### Figure 3

*Screenshot of Isabelle Ardant*



*Note.* An image of Isabelle Ardant from the in-game encyclopedia. She is wearing a black jacket with a ruff, a black choker, earrings, and an identification badge. Taken by Laura Carroll. From Ubisoft Quebec. (2015). *Assassin's Creed Syndicate* [Video game]. Montreuil: Ubisoft.

As with Harriet, the librarian from *Borderlands 3*, Ardant functions as an enemy who is ultimately killed. However, this assassination is not carried out by the player.

This—and every — interaction with Ardant occurs during in-game cinematic scenes (cut scenes). The player's choices and actions do not impact interactions with Ardant; the only non-violent outcome requires the player to not play at all.

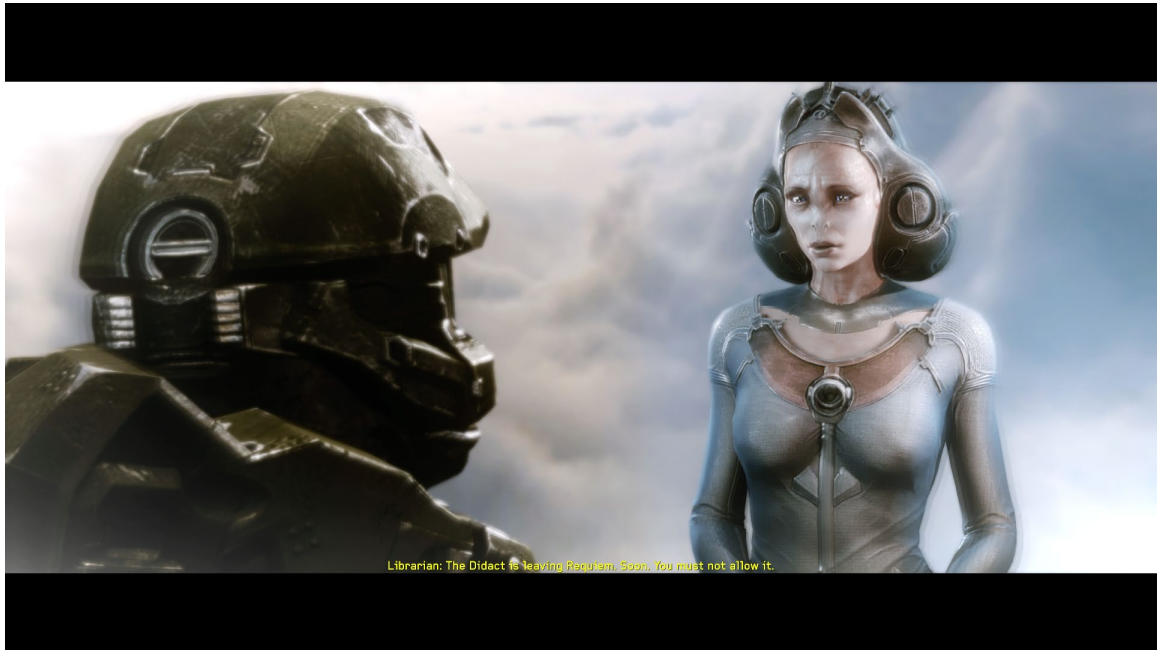
### The Librarian – *Halo 4*

First-Light-Weaves-Living-Song, also known as The Librarian, is a 100,000-year-old alien from *Halo 4* (343 Industries, 2012). The Librarian was a member of an ancient alien species known as the Forerunners. Hundreds of thousands of years ago, humans had advanced space travel technology and were at war with the Forerunners. Players see flashbacks to this time throughout the game and learn that The Librarian imprisoned her husband, The Didact, after he sought to control humans. Though she dies during the war, an imprint of her personality still exists. This imprint helps the player character, known as Master Chief, after he accidentally frees The Didact. Like Isabelle Ardant, The Librarian's work involves archiving genetic information. She uses this ability to genetically alter Master Chief so that he can face The Didact.

The Librarian appears in a long grey dress with a grey headpiece and has grey skin and eyes (see Figure 4). While she is helpful to Master Chief, her motives are unclear. With powerful abilities to shape the genetics of all species, she presents as both heroic and manipulative.

**Figure 4**

*Screenshot of Master Chief speaking with The Librarian in a cut scene*



*Note.* The player looks over Master Chief's shoulder at The Librarian. She is wearing a grey dress, grey headpiece, and has grey skin. Taken by Laura Carroll. From 343 Industries. (2012). *Halo 4* [Video game]. Redmond: Microsoft Studios.

#### *Librarian – Minecraft*

*Minecraft* is a sandbox video game developed by Mojang in 2011. Since its release, *Minecraft* has had 18 major updates (Minecraft Wiki, n.d.-a). This study will reference *Minecraft* Bedrock Edition 1.16.210, the most recent version of the game available for XBOX One at the time of data collection. Some of the features in this version of the game, including the librarian character, are not available in every version of the game.

*Minecraft* features several non-playable living creatures (mobs) such as spiders, pigs, and bees. Villagers are a humanoid mob that can appear in villages, which are

procedurally generated when a player creates a new map seed. Villagers can have one of 15 professions, one of which is Librarian (Minecraft Wiki, n.d.-c). According to the Minecraft Wiki entry on Villagers (n.d.-c), villagers can choose a profession when there is an unclaimed job site block in their village, such as a cauldron or a grindstone. For a village to have a librarian, the village must contain a lectern and an unemployed adult. Not all villages will naturally spawn with a lectern; in the eight villages I explored during data collection, only one had a naturally generated library, lectern, and librarian. Players can build libraries and lecterns within existing villages. If there is an unemployed adult villager, the villager may select the jobsite and become a librarian.

Librarians appear differently depending on their village of origin. On the whole, librarians have a humanoid appearance, glasses, and wear a book on their heads (see Figure 5). They spend most of their day at their job site and will return home at night to sleep.

**Figure 5***Screenshot of librarian*

*Note.* The player stands above a librarian villager. The villager wears a red shirt and white apron. The villager also has glasses and a book on their head. Taken by Laura Carroll. From Mojang. (2011). *Minecraft* [Video game]. Stockholm: Mojang.

One way in which players can interact with librarian villagers is through trading. Players can buy or sell items, such as bookshelves or paper, using emeralds as currency. Both the librarian and the player can earn experience through these trades, which allows them to increase in level. Higher level librarians can trade better items, such as rare enchanted books. Players gain more experience from trades when the librarian is willing to breed (Minecraft Wiki, n.d.-b). See Figure 6 for an image and explanation of the trading menu.

**Figure 6**

*Screenshot of librarian trading menu*



*Note.* The menu depicts trading options for a player who has just begun trading with the librarian. The player can trade 24 pieces of paper for one emerald or trade nine emeralds for one bookshelf. On the right side of the menu, the player can see the items in their inventory and how much experience they will earn through the trade (shown in the grey bar at the top of the right side of the menu). If the player does not have the required items to make the trade, the option will appear as red on the left side of the menu. Once the player has completed enough trades with this librarian, they can make Level 2 Apprentice trades and receive better items. Taken by Laura Carroll. From Mojang. (2011). *Minecraft* [Video game]. Stockholm: Mojang.

As a sandbox game, *Minecraft* does not have a linear narrative. In many ways, the mechanics of *Minecraft* are its narrative, and they can inform the player as to librarians' roles within the game space. For example, librarians' ability to trade, examine bookshelves, and navigate through large villages implies that they have knowledge of literacy, mathematics, and social skills. Their dress varies by region, as does the architectural style of their libraries, however their behaviors remain the same. So, while

librarians have cultural differences from one another, the job title and tasks of librarians remain consistent across cultures. Additionally, librarians form one of three information professions available to villagers (the others are cleric and cartographer), which suggests that villagers value information.

Still, librarians are otherized from the player. As with other mobs in the game, like pigs or cows, librarians can be “farmed” for resources. Players can breed more villagers by increasing the number of beds in a village and through giving the villagers food. Librarians can be killed and will not defend themselves. Ultimately, while valued members of villager society, librarians’ main impact on the player’s narrative is in terms of their output.

#### Library Girl with a Pigtail – *Final Fantasy VIII Remastered*

In 2019, Dotemu, Access Games, & Square Enix released a remastered version of the 1999 role-playing video game *Final Fantasy VIII*. The game follows Squall, a student at a Balamb Garden Military Academy, and his allies as they mobilize against a war. The military academy is home to a library, which is run by members of the Library Committee. One of the Library Committee members is a young woman referred to as Library Girl with a Pigtail (Library Girl).

Library Girl wears a school uniform, which consists of a navy jacket and mini skirt with black stockings. She has long brown hair, which she wears in a braid. We never learn Library Girl’s name — this braid is her main distinguishing trait from other members of the Library Committee.



Both her personality and appearance reflect aspects of the Sexy Librarian. Her primary role in the story is to be a love interest for Squall's friend Zell, which culminates in Library Girl giving Zell a magazine in a hotel lobby. Library Girl will also visit Zell's home and go on dates with him at the cafeteria. Her work as a librarian is consistently linked to her sexuality — Library Girl will lend items or offer reader's advisory when Zell visits the library. Many of her interactions with other Library Committee members involve discussions of Library Girl's relationships. While Library Girl at first appears timid during these interactions, her confidence builds as Squall and Zell visit the library.

While Library Girl may happily locate and lend materials to her love interest, she appears more like the Policeman with other characters. On Squall's first visit to the library, she informs him of library rules (see Figure 7 for a screenshot of their first interaction). Players are informed of five prohibited acts:

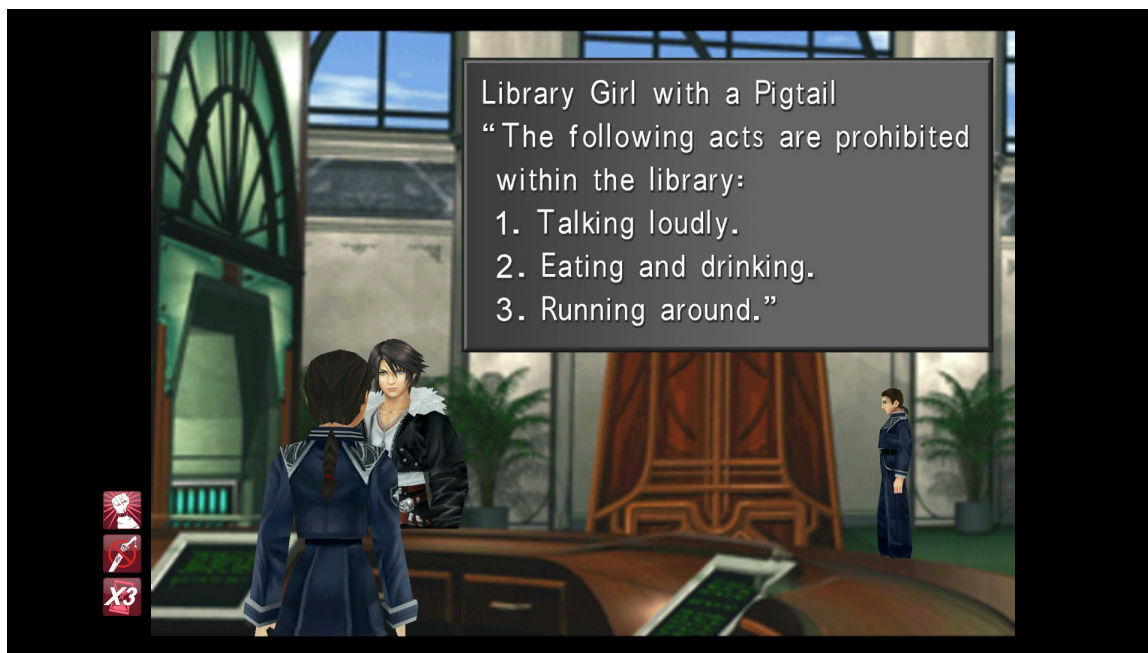
1. Talking loudly
2. Eating and drinking
3. Running around
4. Late returns
5. Fighting over seats (Dotemu et al., 2019).

After being informed of the rules, however, the player learns that Library Girl is practicing for next period, in which she must go over the rules with children. She tells the player that she is nervous about going over the rules and says, "I hope they understand" (Dotemu et al., 2019). Though she may be reluctant about informing children of the rules,

Library Girl still chooses to make this discussion her very first interaction with the player. Library Girl could have begun by describing library services, such as reader's advisory and placing books on hold, or even with saying "hello." Instead, by beginning the conversation with a discussion of prohibited acts, she defines the library by what it forbids rather than what it offers.

### Figure 7

*Screenshot of first interaction with Library Girl*



*Note.* Squall interacts with Library Girl with a Pigtail, and she tells him the rules of the library. Taken by Laura Carroll. From Dotemu, Access Games, & Square Enix. (2019). *Final Fantasy VIII Remastered* [Video game]. Tokyo: Square Enix.

### Madam Irma Pince – *Harry Potter: Hogwarts Mystery*

Madam Irma Pince is a librarian in the *Harry Potter* franchise and appears in the 2018 Jam City video game *Harry Potter: Hogwarts Mystery*. The game takes place a few years before the events of the *Harry Potter* book series and films.

The primary gameplay of *Harry Potter: Hogwarts Mystery* involves spending energy, an in-game currency, to complete tasks. Energy replenishes over time at the rate of one energy every four minutes; if a player runs out of energy, they can either wait for it to be replenished or spend real-world money to purchase gems and then use the gems to purchase energy. The conversion rate of real-world to in-game currency is obscured through the use of gems, but a player would have to pay at least \$4.99 to fully replenish their energy. As a result of this wait-or-pay mechanic, it is difficult to complete portions of the game quickly without spending a substantial amount of real-world money. In my playthrough, I was able to reach Year 2 of the game, which features a few interactions with Madam Pince as a part of the “A Special Celebration of Hogwarts Teachers” side quest. The majority of this discussion is built upon my observations during this side quest; however, I did watch fan-created playthroughs of *Harry Potter: Hogwarts Mystery* to learn about Madam Pince’s role in later quests.

Madam Pince wears a bird-like hat with feathers. Her hair is worn up, possibly in a bun. She also wears a black robe and a gray scarf. With dull clothing and a no-nonsense hairstyle, Pince appears as the stereotypical Bun Lady (see Figure 8). Yet, as with Harriet of *Borderlands 3*, her personality and view of the library more closely resembles that of the Policeman.

**Figure 8**

*Screenshot of Madame Pince in conversation with a student*



*Note.* Madam Pince speaks with a student in the Hogwarts courtyard. She says, “Let’s get this done quickly and efficiently, Miss Murk. A librarian’s life is quite busy and a library waits for no one.” Taken by Laura Carroll. From Jam City (2018). *Harry Potter: Hogwarts Mystery* [Video game]. Culver City: Jam City.

Throughout the game, Pince is an obstacle. In my first encounter with Madam Pince, she was heard during an interview with a student as part of a teacher celebration event (see Figure 8). During the teacher celebration itself, she says, “I am worried about being away from the library... if I’m gone, who will preserve its quiet sanctity” (Jam City, 2018). Pince is also seen shushing students and withholding access to materials. Additionally, many of the main conflicts in the game could be resolved with free and open access to information. The main narrative of *Harry Potter: Hogwarts Mystery* involves cursed vaults that are rumored to exist on Hogwarts grounds. Learning more

about these vaults and the dangers that inhabit them is a vital information need throughout the game. In Year 3, players meet these information needs by luring Madam Pince outside of the library so that they can access materials without her interference. Pince's behaviors indicate that she cares more about protecting library materials than she does about the interests, needs, or even lives of the students she serves.

#### Pingala the Educator– *Civilization VI*

Pingala the Educator is a Governor in the *Rise and Fall* expansion of the turn-based strategy game *Sid Meier's Civilization VI* (Firaxis Games, 2018). The expansion was released in 2018 and adds new features such as city Governors and an "Era Score," which can place players in a Dark Age or Golden Age depending on their actions. Governors like Pingala can be assigned to cities and can earn promotions that improve aspects of the city, such as production or amenities. Each Governor's abilities are specialized. Pingala the Educator's abilities relate to science and culture.

To win the game, players need to meet one of several victory conditions: Science, Culture, Religion, or Domination (Firaxis Games, 2018). If no player meets any of the victory conditions within a specified number of turns, the player with the highest score wins. Pingala the Educator can be strategic for players attempting a Science or Culture victory. His abilities include:

- Librarian: increases Science and Culture in the city.
- Connoisseur: increases the production of arts and culture related buildings in the city.

- Researcher: increases the production of scientific buildings, which includes libraries and universities, in the city.
- Grants: increases the player's ability to attract Great People, such as artists or scientists, to the city.
- Space Initiative: increases the speed of completing space-program projects in the city.
- Arms Race Proponent: increases the speed of completing nuclear projects in the city (Firaxis Games, 2018).

Pingala appears as an adult male with a smiling face. He wears a green turban and a white achkan. He also wears glasses and stores pens inside of his jacket pocket. Figure 9 shows an image of Pingala.

**Figure 9**

*Screenshot of Pingala the Educator*



*Note.* Pingala the Educator is depicted in a menu. Players can see an image of Pingala and read about his abilities by hovering over each title. Taken by Laura Carroll. From Firaxis Games. (2018). *Sid Meier's Civilization VI: Rise and Fall* [Video game]. Novato: 2K Games.

As Pingala does not have any dialogue with the player character, the two main ways in which the player can learn about Pingala are through game mechanics and through the in-game encyclopedia. In terms of mechanics, Pingala is a powerful Governor who can boost a player's chances of achieving a Scientific or Cultural victory. His Librarian title, which raises Science and Culture, is applied as soon as he is settled in

a city and each of his subsequent titles serve to increase the speed at which players can attain scientific and cultural goals. The Librarian title suggests that librarians can improve communities through advancing educational and cultural resources.

In the in-game encyclopedia entry for Librarian, players can learn about the title and its function within the game. The entry states that:

A librarian is responsible for maintaining the books of a library, as well as acquiring new ones that meet the library's standards. This is a relatively ancient profession, which required rare expertise in reading and evaluating texts. Librarians also serve as archivists and preservers of valuable knowledge for future generations. (Firaxis Games, 2018).

While this description of librarianship more closely resembles the historic role of librarians, terms such as “expertise” and “valuable” imply its importance. Furthermore, the entry’s emphasis on archival work to preserve a culture’s knowledge explains the in-game effects of Pingala’s Librarian title in increasing Science and Culture.

Taken together, *Civilization VI*’s mechanics and encyclopedia entries present Pingala as The Superhero Librarian. His work as a librarian improves the city and smooths the player’s path to victory.

#### Tuur – *The Witcher 3: Wild Hunt*

Tuur is a minor character in *Hearts of Stone* (CD Projekt Red, 2015), a DLC expansion pack of *The Witcher 3: Wild Hunt*. He is a member of the Fallen Knights, a human supremacist organization. While the player character, Geralt, never speaks directly with Tuur, it can be assumed that Tuur is prejudiced against non-humans based on his association with the Fallen Knights. The player’s sole interaction with Tuur is in a



bandit camp, in which characters in the camp, including Tuur, attack Geralt.

During this interaction, Geralt and Tuur can be injured or killed.

While the player does not speak with Tuur, they are able to learn more about him through letters found around the campsite. From these letters, the player learns that Tuur used to hold the title of a Library Assistant but now serves the Fallen Knights as a translator (CD Projekt Red, 2015). Tuur has been working on deciphering a crafting diagram, and he and his companions have been crafting fisstech, an illegal drug.

Tuur's appearance does not reflect any particular librarian trope, apart from his glasses (See Figure 10). While he is wearing historical clothing, *The Witcher* is set in Medieval Poland. Tuur also wears an apron, perhaps because of his production of fisstech. When Geralt approaches the bandit camp, Tuur is armed with a maul.

**Figure 10**

*Screenshot of Tuur and Geralt in battle*



*Note.* Tuur faces away from Geralt as he approaches Tuur with his sword drawn. Tuur is wearing a white apron, a brown tunic, and glasses. He holds a maul. Taken by Laura Carroll. From CD Projekt Red. (2015). *The Witcher 3: Wild Hunt – Hearts of Stone* [Video game]. Warsaw: CD Projekt.

#### Urag gro-Shub – *Skyrim*

*The Elder Scrolls V: Skyrim* is a role-playing game that was initially released by Bethesda Game Studios in 2011. A remastered special edition version of the game was released in 2016 and features graphical upgrades. The remastered version was examined in this study.

In the game, players explore a Viking-inspired fantasy province of Skyrim. The province is home to nine major cities, one of which, Winterhold, contains a college for magic practitioners. Within the college is an academic library called the Arcanaeum, managed by the librarian Urag gro-Shub. Urag is an orc and a mage (magic wielder).

Urag also functions as a book merchant and as a college lecturer. Like Tuur, Urag wears historically inspired costume (see Figure 11). His robes are a type of enchanted clothing worn by mages called “Adept Robes” (Bethesda Game Studios, 2016). Urag also carries a dagger.

### Figure 11

*Screenshot of Urag gro-Shub at the circulation desk*



*Note.* Urag sits at a U-shaped circulation desk and drinks from a tankard. On top of the desk, the player can see bottles of wine, a goblet, a quill and ink, a candelabra, and a book. Taken by Laura Carroll. From Bethesda Game Studios (2016). *The Elder Scrolls V: Skyrim – Special Edition* [Video game]. Rockville: Bethesda Softworks.

Urag gro-Shub’s personality and library policies share many traits with the Policeman stereotype. On entering the library, players are reprimanded before even touching the books. Urag greets players saying:

You are now in the Arcanaeum, of which I am in charge. You might as well call it my own little plane of Oblivion. Disrupt my Arcanaeum, and I will have you torn

apart by angry Atronachs. Now, is there anything I can help you with?" (Bethesda Game Studios, 2016).

Urag threatens the player with violence several times. For example, Urag tells the player, "you need a book, you talk to me. Otherwise you're going to find yourself in a lot of pain" (Bethesda Game Studios, 2016).

The Arcanaeum's policies make materials difficult to access. Many of the books are stored within locked cabinets which are inaccessible unless the player picks the lock. Other books can be read, but placing a book into the player's inventory is considered stealing, which can lead to suspension from the college. The library and college are not open to the public. Players must either become students of the school by passing a magical test or by persuading the gatekeeper during part of the game's main story. Thus, the only legal way to acquire books from The Arcanaeum is to become a student of the school and purchase books from Urag gro-Shub. Even still, the items available for purchase are not the best research materials housed at The Arcanaeum. Urag sells "a few things laying around that weren't worth adding to the collection" (Bethesda Game Studios, 2016).

Urag's policing behaviors are perhaps in response to a history of threats to library materials. Through speaking to the citizens of Winterhold, players learn that much of the city mysteriously slipped into the sea. While the college was mostly unharmed, Urag is vigilant in protecting the library's materials. When the player remarks that Urag takes his work seriously, Urag responds saying, "Of course I do. If I didn't, most of these books would've been burned to ashes or dissolved to nothing before the Third Era. Mages need to be reminded to be careful around research materials" (Bethesda Game Studios, 2016).

Some of the mages that attend the College of Winterhold have novice skills in destructive magic, such as casting fire, which poses a risk to flammable materials. Other mages may create experimental spells or conjure creatures from other worlds. As Urag endeavors to “make sure as much knowledge is available as possible,” he creates strict library policies to ensure the collection stays intact (Bethesda Game Studios, 2016). Conversations with Urag highlight the importance of his position in preserving Skyrim’s knowledge.

The game’s mechanics and narrative also indicate Urag’s importance. In *Skyrim*, most adult characters can be killed; however, Urag is permanently marked as “essential,” meaning that he cannot be killed in any way (The Elder Scrolls Wiki, n.d.). The player is still able to attack and injure Urag but he recovers quickly. During the game’s main storyline, the player visits Urag to learn about Elder Scrolls and how to locate them. Even if the player is not a mage, they must still visit Urag gro-Shub at the College of Winterhold to complete the game.

Though Urag gro-Shub is one of the stricter librarian characters in the studied games, he has one of the most important narrative roles. He is one of two secondary characters (the other being Madam Irma Pince) who is not killed during the game’s narrative. Urag gro-Shub illustrates how librarians in *Skyrim* must fight to preserve historical knowledge or risk it falling into the sea.

## Discussion

Librarians in video games reflect the game worlds they inhabit. Their interactions with the player are often rule-based, transactional, or even violent. Though some of their appearances and behaviors reflect stereotypical aspects of librarianship, there was no single stereotype which described all video game librarians. In this section, I will discuss some of the patterns in librarian depictions across the studied games. I will begin by discussing the transactional nature of librarian-player relationships, as well as the labor and job roles of the video game librarians. I will also describe differences in librarian depictions based on the librarian's gender and race.

### Video Game Librarians as Merchants

In several of the studied games, librarians did not offer information for free. Their roles often resembled booksellers more than librarians. Urag gro-Sub of *The Elder Scrolls V: Skyrim – Special Edition* did not offer any materials for check out. The only way students at the College of Winterhold could acquire materials was to purchase them from Urag. In *Minecraft*, a player's sole interaction with the librarian character was through commerce. While Urag gro-Sub and the *Minecraft* Librarian were the only librarians who functioned as merchants, several characters interacted with the player in a transactional way. Harriet, from *Borderlands 3 – Guns, Love, and Tentacles: The Marriage of Wainwright and Hammerlock*, only assisted the player after they silenced a noisy book club. Players had to use energy – the in-game currency in *Harry Potter:*

*Hogwarts Mystery* – to convince Madame Pince to assist with the Valentine’s Day Ball. In *Super Mario Odyssey*, players completed quests for Archivist Toadette, who rewarded players with Power Moons – another in-game currency. To recruit Pingala the Educator of *Sid Meier’s Civilization VI: Rise and Fall*, players must spend a Governor Title, which, once more, functions as a type of currency.

In these transactional relationships, the librarian character only assists the player after some sort of monetary exchange. This exchange is contradictory with the American Library Association's *Library Bill of Rights* (2019), which states that “books and other library resources should be provided for the interest, information, and enlightenment of all people of the community the library serves.” In the sampled video games, most librarians did not provide resources for all members of their community. Instead, they assisted only those who could pay. In a few of the games, players were members of the library community and were still routinely denied access to library materials. Madam Irma Pince and Urag gro-Shub required a monetary exchange before providing certain resources to students. Even after becoming the Arch-Mage (leader) of the College of Winterhold, players still had to pay Urag gro-Shub, steal books from the library, or break into locked bookshelves if they wanted access to library materials.

One of the games presented librarianship as a community investment. In *Sid Meier’s Civilization VI: Rise and Fall*, players were community leaders who could spend in-game currency to recruit librarians. In order to serve communities through increasing scientific and cultural output, Pingala the Educator needed to be hired and paid by civilization leaders. Players could also spend in-game currency to recruit the Great

Scientist Hypatia, who builds a library that also increases scientific output. In *Civilization VI*, players were not community members who experienced barriers to library access. They were leaders who could invest in libraries and librarians for the betterment of their community.

Though librarianship was often depicted as transactional in popular video games, many other relationships with non-player characters were transactional as well. From professors to priests, information professionals routinely required payment in exchange for information. The prevalence of these transactional relationships suggests that the capitalistic nature of librarianship as depicted in these games is not only a reflection of librarianship as a practice but of game mechanics within a capitalistic society.

## Video Game Librarians and Labor

Though librarian characters were sometimes aliens, mushrooms, or orcs, I observed that many of their tasks were reminiscent of real-life librarians. Characters who worked in academic, school, and public libraries engaged in tasks such as reader's advisory, circulation, and programming. Two of the academic librarians, Urag gro-Shub of *The Elder Scrolls V: Skyrim – Special Edition* and Library Girl with a Pigtail of *Final Fantasy VIII Remastered*, led lectures on library-related topics. Librarians in *Minecraft* can be seen shelf-reading, and Madam Pince of *Harry Potter: Hogwarts Mystery* assists a student with a reference session.

Archivists also indexed and preserved materials just like their real-world counterparts, though their motives were often centered around power and control. Both Isabelle Ardant of *Assassin's Creed Syndicate* and The Librarian of *Halo 4* archive



genetic materials. These roles grant them substantial power in shaping human history, and both seek to use archived materials for their own purposes. Less nefariously, Archivist Toadette of *Super Mario Odyssey* indexes quests.

Some characters perform tasks that differed from those of modern information professionals. Though perhaps not traditionally viewed as archival work, Tuur from *The Witcher 3: Wild Hunt – Hearts of Stone* interprets crafting diagrams and produces illegal substances. He also works as a translator. Pingala the Educator of *Sid Meier's Civilization VI: Rise and Fall* also serves as an Arms Race Proponent, speeding up the construction of nuclear armaments.

One task common among all types of librarians was rule-enforcement. In the majority of the studied games (60%, n=6), a player's first interaction with the librarian involved a discussion of rules. Furthermore, the Policeman stereotype was the most common stereotype that I observed while playing. The frequency of rule-enforcement and policing often resulted in access barriers for players. Players were sometimes unable to enter libraries, were shushed by librarians when attempting to speak, violently attacked upon entering the library, or were prevented from acquiring materials. The prevalence of rule-based and policing behavior reflects negatively on the field of librarianship. However, policing behaviors become more complicated when considered within the medium of gaming, as games themselves are a rule-based media. Nine of the 10 games began with an explanation of rules – a tutorial – and the rules themselves did not make the games less fun or accessible. Though game mechanics limit a player's options and

movement within game spaces, these boundaries give play purpose. Other institutions within the games, such as militaries, schools, and corporations, were similarly rule-based.

## Video Game Librarians and Race

With a non-random sample of ten video game librarians, this study may not reflect the characteristics of librarian video game characters as a whole. However, as these characters are found in best-selling video game franchises, their representations are some of the more common representations of librarians that the average gamer will encounter. As such, the racial and gender stereotypes in this sample, while perhaps not present in the entire population, are more visible to players. Though the sampled games reflected a greater racial diversity than exists within American librarianship, many groups, such as Black librarians, were absent. While the second-most common racial identity of US librarians is Black, there were no Black librarians in the sample (Data USA, 2017b).

Games that portrayed Asian librarians featured stereotypes of Asian Americans. Of the two Asian female characters, both are depicted as the Sexy Librarian. The Asian female characters were also the only sexualized characters in the sample. In a 2009 study on racial microaggressions against Asian Americans, Sue et al. observed the exoticization of Asian American women as one of eight themes (p. 76). While neither of the Asian female characters is Asian American (Isabelle Ardant was born in Hong Kong and lives in the United Kingdom and Library Girl with a Pigtail is from a fantasy world), both characters are part of franchises with a global appeal. In describing gender coding in the

*Final Fantasy* series, Filipowich (2018) describes the global and domestic aspects of the series writing that:

*Final Fantasy* is caught directly in this cultural ebb and flow; as tempting as it is to declare *Final Fantasy* as either a purely domestic product or as an entirely postmodern global text subject only to reader response, the interplay of domestic and global aesthetic movements must be considered in analyzing how *Final Fantasy* represents and resists gendered performance. (p. 120)

*Final Fantasy* and *Assassin's Creed* players will respond to Library Girl with a Pigtail and Isabelle Ardant differently depending on their cultural assumptions about Asian women and librarians.

While both characters are sexualized, each challenges American stereotypes of Asian women as “only needed for the physical needs of White men” or as “sexual objects” (Sue et al., 2009, p. 76). Library Girl with a Pigtail was initially anxious when speaking to her crush but gained confidence over the course of the game. She is an active participant in her romantic relationship with Zell. Isabelle Ardant is a high-ranking archivist and scholar who is willing to kill Assassins who interfere with her work. Both characters were more complex than a single stereotype – Isabelle Ardant recalled the Monster and Library Girl with a Pigtail had elements of the Policeman.

When comparing the Asian female librarians to white female librarians, their sexualities are depicted differently. Both white female librarians (Madame Pince and Harriet) are shown in heterosexual relationships. However, rather than being sexualized, the white female characters are depicted as unattractive Bun Ladies. Madame Pince's romantic interest in Filch the caretaker in *Harry Potter: Hogwarts Mystery* is almost farcical.

## Video Game Librarians and Gender

While I did not observe an overarching librarian stereotype in video game librarians, some librarian stereotypes did present along gendered lines. The Bun Lady and the Sexy Librarian were observed in female characters but not in male characters.

Depictions of male characters varied, and no male character reflected the same stereotype as another male character (see Table 2). The Inept Librarian, which is often attributed to male librarians, was not depicted in this sample. While some of the female characters exhibited tropes of women in video games, such as the Ms. Male Character, no single stereotype or trope was common among the majority of female characters.

Heterosexuality was pervasive in female librarians. All romantic relationships with librarian characters involved female librarians and a male love interest. The *Minecraft* librarian villager could be an exception to this heterosexuality, as they are able to reproduce with any consenting adult villager; however, these relationships are sexual and not romantic. The villager does not form any relationship with their mate outside of the act of procreation. The villager librarian is also the only character who could be seen as non-binary.

## Conclusion

This study expands upon existing research on librarian stereotypes by assessing their presence within an interactive medium. The literature review indicated a history of study on librarian depictions in popular culture, including print media, cinema, and online videos. Yet, there is a lack of academically accredited research on the topic of librarians in video games. This study is one of the first to examine the topic in detail.

Overall, the librarians in the video games reviewed reflected aspects of existing librarian stereotypes, including the Bun Lady, Policeman, Superhero, Tattooed Librarian, Monster, and Sexy Librarian. There was no single stereotype depicted in all video game librarians, but there were some commonalities. The Policeman was the most frequently observed librarian stereotype (n=4, 40%). Eighty percent of librarians wore some sort of visual signifier of intellectual work. Librarian relationships with the player were often transactional, violent, or rule-based.

Additionally, Librarians in video games were subject to racist, sexist, and heterosexist stereotypes reflected throughout popular media depictions of librarianship. Female librarians exhibited stereotypes such as the Bun Lady, and the two Asian female characters were the sole depictions of the Sexy Librarian. Stereotypes of male librarians were more varied. As librarian stereotypes are grounded in systematic inequality, they

cannot be eliminated through singular alternative depictions of librarianship.

Rather, librarians must dismantle systems of power that underlie the profession.

This topic deserves much further study, as this research was limited to a few titles. As there is no easily accessible list of librarian characters in video games, I had to search the tutorials and guides of each video game included in Wikipedia's "List of Best-Selling Video Game Franchises" (2020). Some games had a limited web presence, making it difficult to determine presence of a librarian character in every game. It is possible that some games were unintentionally excluded due to missing information on video game wiki sites.

Additionally, due to the time and financial constraints of this study, I limited my sample to best-sellers. This sampling decision was justified, as my research interest was common depictions of librarians in video games and these best-selling games have a large playership. There may be differences in depictions of librarians in this sample and in independent games. A possible expansion of this study could be to analyze a larger sample or select games using different criteria.

The methodology of this study incorporates both narrative analysis and ludology. Though this approach is not entirely novel, it expands upon existing content analysis approaches to video game studies by evaluating both story and mechanics through a constructionist approach.

For librarians and library stakeholders, this research can inform practice. In better understanding the potential stereotypes library users may hold, professionals can respond to and challenge misunderstandings. Game designers can also benefit from an

understanding of the librarian stereotype in games so that they can make decisions about depictions and characterization.

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## Appendix A. Coding Worksheet

**Game Name:** Enter the entire name of the game.

**Publisher:** Enter the name of the production company that created the game.

**Release Date (YYYY/MM/DD):** Enter the date in which the game was first released for purchase.

**Genre:** Enter the game's genre as defined by the video game's publisher.

**Platform:** Name the console used to play the video game.

Provide a brief synopsis of the game and note any broad themes:

1. **Character name:** Enter the full name of the librarian character, as well as any alternate names given to the character.
2. **Character Physical Description:** Describe the character's physical appearance.
3. **Character Traits:** List any overarching personality traits that describe the character.
4. **Character species:** Identify the character's species, such as alien, human, or robot.
5. **Character race/ethnicity:** Identify the character's race and/or ethnicity based off stereotyped information such as country of origin, physical appearance, and accent. Non-human characters may be coded as "non-human" if they do not have any discernable features associated with race or ethnicity. Additionally, note if a character's race or ethnicity is ambiguous or not easily discernable.
6. **Character gender:** Identify the gender of the character based off of stereotyped information such as sex characteristics, name, pronouns, and expression. Non-human characters may be coded as "non-human" if they do not have any

discernable features associated with gender. Additionally, note if a character's gender is ambiguous or not easily discernable.

7. **Character age:** Identify the relative age of the character based on stereotyped information, such as appearance and voice. Additionally, note if a character's age is ambiguous or not easily discernable.
8. **Character sexual orientation:** Identify the sexual orientation of the character, if known.
9. **Relationship to player character:** If the character is a secondary or tertiary character, describe their relationship to the primary character, such as romantic partner, party member, or enemy.
10. **Principality:** Is the character a primary, secondary, or tertiary character?  
 Primary: a main character, typically controlled by the player.  
 Secondary: a character who speaks and interacts with main characters as a part of the game's storyline.  
 Tertiary: a background character. The player may interact with this character but may not necessarily engage with the character throughout the course of the game.
11. **Job Title:** State the job title of the character, such as librarian or archivist, if known.

## 12. Character Stereotypes:

Circle any of the following tropes that apply to the character:

The Bun Lady  
 The Policeman  
 The Superhero  
 The Inept Librarian  
 The Tattooed Librarian  
 The Sexy Librarian  
 The Monster

## Character-related mechanics:

13. Is the character playable?
14. Is the character able to be injured or killed by the player?



15. Does this character have or use a weapon?

16. Does this character assign quests?

17. Does this character sell items to the player?

Record any other details about character-related game mechanics that have not been noted above: